

Saul: His Election to the Throne

1 Samuel 8-12
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Today we continue our Intermittent Old Testament studies with a look at that stage in the history of Israel involving the establishment of the Israelite Monarchy. There are a couple of reasons for this. The first and most obvious is that all of us are concerned about what is happening in our own country, particularly with regard to our national leaders. We need to have some information from the Scriptures as to how we should respond to that situation, what our counsel should be to people around us, and what God's plan is, in terms of political leadership. The Scriptures will be very helpful in this regard. They give us very clear directives about true leadership and all that leadership entails. As Christian citizens (and as some of you perhaps will become Christian statesmen) we need to know what the Bible teaches.

The second reason is that God wants us to be kings. Our kingdom is our environment - our body and everything that touches us - and we are intended to be kings in that kingdom. We are to "reign in life," as the apostle Paul tells us. The principles in Scripture which deal with the direction and leadership of a nation pertain to our own personal lives as well. So as we review these principles together I am hopeful that you will learn more of how to rule yourself.

The account of the establishment of the Hebrew monarchy begins in the eighth chapter of 1 Samuel. First, a bit of background to this passage. The Hebrew nation was promised to Abraham about two thousand years before Christ. God called this man from Mesopotamia and told him that he would be the father of a great nation, that his own name would be great, that through his nation the whole world would be blessed, and that from him kings would come. This prophecy was fulfilled in part some six hundred years later when the Israelites came out of Egypt and became a nation. They came out an aggregation of slaves, but when they crossed the Red Sea they became a congregation, they became a nation. Paul says that they were baptized into Moses. They were united with him. They became one. And from that point on they became a unique nation. The world has never seen another kingdom like the kingdom of Israel.

They traveled down to Mount Sinai, where they spent a year, and there they were given the Law, the statutes, and the judgments. They were given directions for establishing the priesthood and for erecting the Tabernacle. And all the other requirements for the nation were delivered at that time. At Sinai they received their "constitution."

Then, under Moses' leadership, they traveled twice to the borders of Canaan. Once they turned back because of unbelief; the second time they entered into the land Moses died there at the border of the land. But for forty years previously he had been their leader. I never realized until studying through that account again recently that Moses was called a king. Moses, basically, was the first king of the nation. He is called, in Deuteronomy, the king of Jeshurun. Jeshurun is a Hebrew word which means "righteous ones", and it refers to the nation of Israel. So Moses, in God's eyes, was a king, a ruler, the leader of Israel. He was replaced when he died by Joshua, who took the nation into the land of Canaan. Joshua led them in their conquest of the land, and for twenty-five years he was their leader.

When he died, the nation began to decline. The book of Judges is a history of the moral, spiritual, and political collapse of the nation of Israel. There was no leadership in Israel, apart from a few local judges whom God raised up in times of oppression to deliver the nation. But there was no king over Israel. In looking at this period the inspired writer of Judges says a number of times that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. And that was the problem. There was no leader to whom the nation could look.

If you have read through the book of Judges lately, it must have struck you that the circumstances at that time were almost exactly analogous to our circumstances today. It was a time when the nation was becoming increasingly secularized. What little worship they engaged in was directed toward false gods. They turned away from Jehovah. Eventually their central sanctuary at Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines. So then they had no place in which they could worship, but they couldn't have cared less. They declined morally, and their homes fell apart. The book of Judges depicts that period in history as a time of

violence, corruption, and anarchy. The nation was spiritually bankrupt. They had no leader, no king in Israel. And so the time had come for the kingdom, the monarchy, to be established.

Samuel was the last judge over Israel, and his tenure marks the transition between the period of the judges and the period of the monarchy. Let's begin reading at verse 1:

And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.

Let me say, as an aside, that this passage should be a source of encouragement to parents. Sometimes our children are unrighteous because we have been unrighteous parents. But sometimes, despite our attempts to be godly parents, our children still go astray, as in the case of Samuel's. We cannot force their wills; they must choose. The nation of Israel could not find one thing in Samuel's life which they could reproach. He was an honest, God-loving, God-fearing judge. And yet his children went astray spiritually. We don't know why, but they did. God never rebuked Samuel for this. Eli, his predecessor, whose children were also corrupt, was rebuked, because he did not deal with the sins of his children. But that was not true of Samuel. As far as we know Samuel did everything he could have, and yet his children turned away from God, not because he was unrighteous but because they chose to.

Samuel had appointed them as judges, perhaps before they became corrupt. But they had corrupted their judgeships. Samuel evidently had sent them down to the south, to Beersheba, where they should have been out of trouble. Beersheba is out in the wilderness, in the Negeb, where they couldn't really have been a part of the central government. But they became unrighteous judges nevertheless, and the nation was afraid of them. They knew that Samuel's sons would follow him and that they would soon be the judges over Israel. And the people did not want that to occur. At this same time the Philistines were threatening, the Ammonites (their distant relatives who lived right across their eastern border) were ready to invade, and they knew that something had to change. So in verses 4 through 6 we read,

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah where he lived; and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord.

That, by the way, is what we ought to do when things displease us. Samuel was rejected by the people - and when ever we are rejected it hurts - and he was displeased. But instead of venting his displeasure upon the people he turned to the Lord. And, as the Lord so faithfully does, he did not necessarily change the circumstances but he changed Samuel's attitude by ministering to his need. Verses 7 through 9:

And the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day - in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods - so they are doing to you also. Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them."

It would appear from reading this passage alone that the nation was wrong in requesting a king, but that is not the case. God had anticipated their need for a king, and in Deuteronomy 17: 120, he had given them directions concerning this. He told them what kind of king they were to select. And the writer of Judges concludes that the problem was that there was no king, it was not wrong for Israel to seek a king; what was wrong was the spirit in which they asked. This spirit was wrong in two ways. First, they wanted a king like all the other nations. Essentially, they rejected God as their king. They wanted a replacement in the form of some tangible, human king whom they could see, some visible source of faith, someone they could believe in.

It was wrong for them to want a king like all the other nations. The kings of the other nations were despots.

And in verses 10 and following Samuel tells them what the nature of the king will be if they select one like that: "He will use you. He will be tyrannical." The kings of the other nations considered themselves to be gods. The Egyptian Pharaoh was supposedly the incarnation of the sun God. They were cruel, capricious, despotic kings who would use the people. So God says that it was wrong for them to seek a king like the other nations. God has a different plan for his people. He wants us to be different. We are not to be like the world. We don't like that, because we don't like to be different. We don't like to stand out and to be weird; we like to blend into the background. But it is God's plan, his unique plan, that his people be different.

Secondly, they had rejected God as their king, God wanted to reign through a human instrument. He wanted to retain all the provisions of the theocracy in the monarchy. He wanted a man who would be under his authority and through whom he could work out his righteous rule. But this the people rejected. They wanted a human replacement for God.

Now, God's plan for the nation of Israel was perfect. It is spelled out in the Deuteronomy 17 passage mentioned earlier. It would be helpful just to glance at that section. In it there are four statements made about the king who would be God's king in Israel. First, he was not to use his power to gain personal privilege. He was not to multiply horses, he was not to multiply wives, he was not to multiply silver and gold. He was not to use his position to feather his own nest.

Secondly, he was to be a brother. Twice this passage says that he is taken from among his brothers. He is not to place himself above his brothers; he is to serve them. You see, true leadership, in terms of God's understanding of leadership, is not lordship; it is servanthood. True leadership is not measured by the number of people we have working for us; it is measured by the number of people we serve. God's king would be a servant to his brothers. He would not be a God; he wouldn't even be a close relative of the gods; he would be a brother. He would serve.

The third provision, and the most important, is found in verses 18 through 20:

Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen....

He was to make a copy of God's word. He was to read it every day. And he was to obey it. He was under the authority of God's word. Wouldn't it be a great thing if the leaders of our country would take that statement seriously! If they would read God's word every day and would accept its authority in their lives what a changed country we would have! Because authority comes from God. No man has authority in himself. Power does not derive from the individual - I don't care what credentials you have. Power does not derive from us, from anything inherent in us; power comes from God. It is only as we submit to his authority in our life that we have authority. That is true in any realm of leadership, whether it is in your home or your office, or whether you are a political leader.

The fourth thing which God said to the nation was that when they set about to select a king, he would not be the king of their choice; he would be the king that God chose. Saddeningly, Israel rejected these four principles - they rejected them wholesale. "We want a king like other nations, one who will be like a God." The result was that it was forty years before they had the man after God's heart. Meanwhile they had Saul, the man after their own hearts, Saul, the man of the flesh. There were forty years of tragedy and darkness in the life of the nation because they chose their own man. It took forty years before God could install the man after his own heart, king David.

Back now to 1 Samuel 9, where we will look at the account of the election of king Saul to the throne. Samuel's account of Saul's life can be divided into three parts. The first section, chapters 1-2, deals with his election to the throne. Chapters 1-15 deal with his deflection from the course. He turned away from God and began to go his own way. And chapters 16-31 deal with his rejection by the Lord.

At the end of his life Saul's own commentary on his life was, "I have played the fool." Saul was a fool. In biblical terms, a fool is a man who rejects the truth that he has. A wise man is one who acts according to the truth, who applies it. But a fool rejects the truth. Saul had a very hopeful beginning, but his own analysis of

his life was that he had played the fool. Let's look at this first section - which we'll not have time to complete this morning - the account of Saul's anointing at Ramah:

Now there was a son of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zero,; the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valor. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.

Saul had a number of natural assets which made him the obvious human choice for king. He was raised in a good family. As a matter of fact, it must have been a godly family - his name means "asked of God". He must have been a son who was especially requested, who was given as a gift of God He was an imposing figure, head and shoulders above the rest of his countrymen. He was bright, he was strong, he was courageous. He had all the natural assets a king would need. He had a regal bearing which made him the obvious choice of the people.

In verses 14 you have the account of Saul's search for his donkeys. He was living in Gibeath, and his father sent him out to find some donkeys which had strayed. He traveled through out the territories of Benjamin and Ephraim with his servant, but he couldn't find the donkeys. They eventually ran out of provisions and had to return home. As they journeyed home they "happened" to go by Ramah. I say "happened" because you can see God's hand in all of this. Though it appeared that Saul was carrying out the instructions of his father, it was God who was getting Saul to the right place at the right time to give Israel what they had chosen. Because that is what God will do. If we insist on our own way, God will see to it that we get it.

Saul mentioned to his servant that a prophet lived at Ramah, and they proceeded into the city to find the prophet, who was Samuel, thinking that Samuel might have a word about their missing donkeys. But the Lord had preceded Saul, verses 15 and 16:

Now a day before Saul's coming, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel saying, "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he shall deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people because their cry has come to Me."

This was advance notice that Saul was on his way. Samuel knew whom God had chosen.

When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, "Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people."

Samuel evidently was just as impressed as everyone else by Saul's appearance, because the account says, literally, "the Lord answered him," presumably in response to a request. When Samuel saw Saul he asked, "Lord, is this he? This must be he!" And the Lord said, "Yes, because the people have demanded a king, this is the man whom I have chosen. This is the one who shall rule over my people."

Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate, and said, "Please tell me where the seer's house is. "And Samuel answered Saul and said, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today; and in the morning I will let you go, and will tell you all that is on your mind. And as for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's household?"

God wanted the very best for Saul, everything that was desirable. And Samuel said, "In the morning, Saul, I'm going to give you the best. I'm going to tell you all that is in your mind." I think, reading between the lines, that we can see that Saul was a man who, at this point in his life did seek the best. He perhaps was just as concerned as Samuel and others about the political situation in Israel, and he wanted to do something significant. So Samuel tells him that in the morning he will reveal what is in his mind. The account goes on to tell how Samuel and Saul ate together. Samuel invited thirty of the leaders of Ramah to join them. They ate and discussed the situation in Israel. Through the night Saul and Samuel talked on the roof of Samuel's house, and, verse 26 through verse 1 of chapter 10:

And they arose early; and it came about at daybreak that Samuel called to Saul on the roof, saying, "Get up, that I may send you away." So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street. As they were going down to the edge of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Say to the servant that he might go ahead of us and pass on, but you remain standing now, that I may proclaim the word of God to you." Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said, "Has not the Lord anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?"

Prior to this there were only two occasions when anointings took place. Priests were anointed, and the sanctuary was anointed. Anointing with oil is a symbol of the pouring out of the Spirit of God upon someone. It is a sign of God's approval. It is a seal that a person is pleasing to him, and that therefore he is pouring himself out upon that person. And now God, in this very picturesque way, is showing Saul that his pleasure rests upon him, that he is instituting the monarchy, establishing Saul as the king. Then there follow three signs which Samuel gives Saul which are confirmatory of his anointing:

"When you go from me today, then you will find two men close to Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, "The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. Now behold, your father has ceased to be concerned about the donkeys and is anxious for you, saying, "What shall I do about my son?" Then you will go on further from there, and you will come as far as the oak of Tabor, and there three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you, one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a jug of wine; and they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from their hand. Afterward you will come to the hill of God [The Hebrew says "Gibeah of God". This is Saul's hometown.] where the Philistine garrison . . .

There was a stockade housing a garrison of Philistines in Saul's hometown. Evidently many times in his life he had looked up the hill and had seen that Philistine stronghold. It symbolized everything that was hateful to the Israelites - the fact that their enemies dwelt there among them.

"...and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying. Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires, for God is with you. And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do." Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. When they came to the hill there [Gibeah], behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them. And it came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" And a man there answered and said, "Now, who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

As he leaves Samuel, God gives Saul three signs that his appointment is from him, The first is that he will meet two people who will inform him that the animals have been found and will provide him with information which will set his heart at rest. He was anxious and concerned about the donkeys, and this information would set him free from that worry, and from all the other little things that were bothering him, so that he would be free to go about fulfilling his kingly role.

The second sign was that three men would give him bread out of their own provisions. Remember that Saul and his servant were out of bread. They didn't even have a loaf to take to the seer when they went to Ramah. So there would be provision to meet their need.

And third, as he went to his hometown, in the face of opposition "right there In River City", there would be a divine endowment, there would be power from God which would change him. He would be a different man. He would be able to do something for which he was not qualified by his heredity. The people later asked the question, "Who is his father? He is not a prophet, he doesn't have the credentials of a prophet, and yet he is prophesying," And this became a proverb In Israel Whenever they saw someone doing something inexplicable they would say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Do you see what God promised? Here was a young man who had been anointed as king over Israel, and God promised him three things. First, his peace of mind - freedom from all the little things which would keep him from being a king, information which would give him quietness of heart, which would settle him down and calm his spirit so that he would be able to occupy himself with things which were really significant - the peace of God. The second thing was daily provision, bread to meet his needs when he needed it - perhaps at the moment of extremity, but yet adequate resources in time of need. And third, a supernatural endowment, power from on high which would enable him to do things which were extraordinary, for which he was not qualified. He would become a prophet in Israel. He was well qualified for the task, but his sufficiency came not from himself but from God, "who has made us sufficient," as Paul said. It wasn't his size, it wasn't his strength, it wasn't his natural capabilities which qualified him. He was just a vessel to be filled and flooded with God, given God's peace, God's provision, God's power. And God said, "Whatever you have to do, Saul, do it! whatever the occasion demands, I am with you, whether it is a small thing or a great thing."

We too are anointed as kings. God has intended us to reign over life - over our bodies, over our passions, over our environment, over every aspect of life. And we too are given these three things. We are given the peace of God - information from God's word and God's Spirit which sets us at ease, gives us peaceful, quiet hearts, so that we are not being enervated and drained by thinking about all the worrisome little things that occur in our life. We are free from worrying so that we can get on with our kingly task. Secondly, we are given provision. Paul says, "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Whatever you need, there is provision for it. And third, there is power, power to do the extraordinary, power to act contrary to your nature, power to face any foe - even the garrison of Philistines which is located right there in your hometown - adequate power. And God says, "Whatever you have to do, do it, and I will be with you."

This has solved for me the problem of how to know whether or not God wants me to do something great. How do you know whether God has some small thing or some great thing in store for you? That doesn't matter. Whatever you must do, do it, whether it is a small thing or a great thing - do it - God is with you. Perhaps today Billy Graham has to preach before fifty thousand people. He can do it in peace, in poise, and in power, because God is with him. Perhaps you have to go home and wash the dirty dishes in the sink, or go back to an unloving husband, or an unloving wife, or unruly kids, or whatever. You can do it. Whatever you have to face, you can do it, because God is with you. You have ample supply. And people will say about you, as they said about Saul, "There's something extraordinary about that person. I can't explain him. I just don't understand why he acts the way he does." Because you have a supernatural power, something which comes from God.

Now, Saul squandered his inheritance and lost it. God forbid that we should. We can act on the basis of all that God has given us. We have everything we need in order to face any circumstances that we must face, and we can know that God is with us.

Father, this is a great and encouraging word. Many of us are - facing into situations which are threatening and frightening, and some things which are just downright dull. And yet, Lord, we know that we can do these things because you are with us, and that we have, through your Son, the provision which will enable us to reign in life, to reign as you intended kings to reign, and we thank you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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